United Nations E/CN.9/2012/NGO/1

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
31 January 2012

Original: English

Commission on Population and Development
Forty-fifth session
23-27 April 2012
Item 4 of the provisional agenda*
General debate on national experience in population matters: adolescents and youth

Statement submitted by International Women's Health Coalition, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.9/2012/2.

12-21978 (E) 230212

Please recycle

Statement

In 2011, the world's population reached 7 billion. We are now living in an era where we have the largest generations ever of young people under the age of 19, amounting to 2.5 billion. As these children and adolescents grow up, start engaging in sexual activity and face unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections, HIV and complications during pregnancy and childbirth, demographic momentum will play a significant role. This requires urgent attention by the international community to ensure that adolescents receive education on sexual and reproductive rights and health, information, access to comprehensive services and supplies, and to also ensure that their human rights are protected, including full respect for their privacy and confidentiality.

Governments have a clear obligation to promote and protect the right of all individuals, including adolescent girls, to decide freely on all matters relating to their sexuality and reproduction, including decisions on whether to have children, and eventually the number, spacing, and timing of them, and the right to have the information and means to do so. Fulfilment of the right to the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health, free of violence, discrimination or coercion, requires that women, adolescents and young people have access to the full range of contraceptive choices, including male and female condoms, as well as comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, based on full and informed consent.

Three key actions are necessary to achieve health and development for adolescent girls and young women:

(a) Make comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services universally available to all adolescents, with full respect to their privacy and confidentiality, including all forms of contraception, access to safe abortion, skilled care during pregnancy and delivery and preventive care and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, including HIV;

(b) Strengthen health-care systems to ensure equitable access to these services, and provide health information and comprehensive sexuality education to adolescents and young people, particularly adolescent girls, through services that are appealing to adolescents and young people;

(c) Invest in policies, programmes and legislative and judiciary actions that give adolescent girls access to economic resources, skills training and social support, and that protect their human right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of coercion, discrimination or violence.

Only healthy women whose human rights are protected can be fully productive workers and effective participants in their country's political processes. Only fully informed and empowered adolescents can make responsible choices as they enter into relationships and begin their sexual and reproductive lives. Development and poverty eradication strategies work when universal and equitable access to sexual and reproductive health and the protection of human rights are achieved.